

**ARNOLD
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Glimpse behind the veil

Collections of speeches by dead politicians are customarily boring. They are usually, as they say in the book trade, remaindered before they have even been distributed to the bookstores. Usually these non-books are published in order to make the deceased statesman's family happy.

In a few weeks, however, there will be published a collection of speeches which are going to be read and read. They are the public speeches made by William J. Casey, former head of the Central Intelligence Agency and one of the most controversial figures in the half-century history of the agency.

The speeches have been skillfully edited by Herbert E. Meyer, Mr. Casey's onetime special assistant and sometime chairman of the National Intelligence Council. The reason I mention Mr. Meyer, now president of Real-World Intelligence Inc., is that as editor of the Casey volume he has written editorial introductions to the speeches so as to place them in their temporal context. One of his introductions is bound to set off an explosion.

The Meyer introduction is titled "Responsible Journalism: Lives Are At Stake." It deals with The Washington Post's Bob Woodward who in his book, "Veil," published in 1987, accused Mr. Casey himself of being responsible for the attempted assassination of Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah in Beirut on March 8, 1985. Mr. Woodward alleged that in violation of a federal law barring government complicity in assassinations, Mr. Casey had personally ordered the car-bombing which, according to Mr. Woodward, was carried out by Saudi Arabia at Mr. Casey's request.

In the event, the car bomb which went off 50 yards from Sheikh Fadlallah's high-rise apartment killed 80 people and wounded scores more. The intended victim was unhurt.

Mr. Meyer says that Mr. Casey's speech, delivered to the American Jewish Committee May 15, 1986, "shatters Woodward's version of events." Although Mr. Casey named no names in that speech, Mr. Meyer does. He delivers a blow at Mr. Woodward which will raise the severest questions about the integrity of one of the most senior editors of The Washington Post. Mr. Meyer describes Mr. Woodward's version of events as "a monumental lie."

Mr. Woodward's story of Mr. Casey's alleged responsibility for the car-bombing was thoroughly investigated at the time by the House Select Committee on Intelligence. It concluded that so far as the CIA was concerned, "no complicity of direct or indirect involvement can be established with respect to the March 8 bombing in Beirut."

What makes the Meyer charge of "monumental lie" particularly significant are two linked events. Despite warnings by Mr. Casey and other CIA officials that Mr. Woodward's allegations if published would surely be followed by an act of reprisal by Middle East terrorists, his story ran anyway in The Washington Post on May 12, 1985. It was followed a month later by the hijacking of TWA Flight 847, a Boeing 727, en route from Athens to Rome.

The 17-day ordeal for the 153 people aboard included the murder of Robert Stethem — a U.S. Navy petty officer second class — an act publicly described by the terrorists who seized the airliner as retaliation for the supposed U.S.-sponsored car-bombing the previous month. Petty Officer Stethem was shot, tossed onto the runway to die when the 727 landed for a second time in Beirut on June 15, 1985.

The assassin, Mohammed Ali Hamadi, was convicted last Wednesday by a West German court in Frankfurt and sentenced to life in prison. The question now is whether he will serve his sentence or have it commuted for the return of Germans now held prisoner in Lebanon.

In the meantime, the question of Bob Woodward's honor as a journalist is now on the line.

Arnold Beichman, a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, is a columnist for The Washington Times.

The Washington Post _____
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